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CORRESPONDENCE.

Naturalists and 'Concealing Coloration.'

EDITOR OF 'THE AUK.'

Dear Sir: — In a letter just received from Mr. John T. Coolidge 3rd. now in British East Africa, he writes: "What you say about an object of uniform color against the sky seen from below has been impressed upon me lately. I find that in hiding to ambush game for moving pictures, it is essential to have an opaque background, otherwise you are sure to be detected, silhouetted against the sky. I am going to pin white strips of paper on my shoulders and helmet, when an opaque background is not obtainable.

I am doubtful about getting a Chapman's Zebra, but shall not fail to bring you a Grant's Zebra. Individuals vary tremendously but many Grant's Zebra have jet black stripes on a clean white ground. Rarely they have a faint supplementary stripe between the others and sometimes the stripes are brown on a yellow-cream ground, but I will look for a contrasty one. I have moving pictures of Zebra coming to water which show the extreme fear they have of approaching the bushy and reedy water holes, even by day. In the rains, they can drink out of pans in the open, but all permanent water is surrounded by bush or reeds, or usually both. * * *

This should remind the reader of the obviousness of what I have repeatedly tried to show to naturalists, that the laws of illumination and vision are the same the world over, and that the naturalists who have opposed the progress of this great biological discovery merely need to study these laws.

This well known variation of zebras' colors from black and white to brown and yellow is absolutely parallel to the variations of form and other characters, equally well known in almost all species. All the cases are more or less obviously traceable to corresponding variation in the animals' circumstances.

In the Zebra's case, for instance, pure black and white are a little the best costume where the sky, and particularly stocky (and therefore particularly opaque) reeds tend to be the animal's sole background. On the other hand, in a region where more translucent vegetation and less open sky are typical, so that the lightest note behind the zebra is apt to be mere lighted foliage oftener than sky, a brown and yellow zebra would often match a little closer than a black and white one.

Yours very truly,

ABBOTT H. THAYER.

Monadnock, N. H.

Sept. 11, 1913.